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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 3671
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000333

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SUBJECT: PAPUA -- PROPOSAL ON PROVINCES SPARKS OPPOSITION

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A proposal to divide the Papuan region into three more provinces--in addition to the current two--has stirred controversy and anger. The national legislature in Jakarta has endorsed a draft proposal to this effect, while President Yudhoyono favors a go-slow approach. Many Papuans feel that the new proposals are an attempt to splinter the region politically. Not wanting to stir the pot in a restive region, the Indonesian government almost certainly will be cautious and will listen carefully to the objections of Papuans before proceeding with anything controversial. END SUMMARY.

PROVINCES ANYONE?

12. (U) Indonesians are debating various proposals about provinces in the Papuan region. In late January, the Indonesian legislature (DPR) approved a proposal to create three new provinces in Papua. Under the plan, three new provinces--South Papua, Central Papua, Southwest Papua--will be created in addition to the current two (Papua and West Papua) for a total of five. The DPR's measure did not specify the exact configuration of the proposed provinces, and contained some confusing language alluding to the possible creation of another province for a total of six.

13. (C) Advocates of the creation of the new provinces are a bit hazy as to why new provinces are needed. They seem to believe that new provinces will lead to better governance in the region. Other contacts believe that there are other reasons. For example, according to Ronny Tapilatu, Special Assistant to Papua Governor Barnabas Suebu, Johannes Gluba Gebse--the regent of Merauke--wants a new province to escape Suebu's restrictions on forestry development. Gebse has already secured pledges of financial support from investors who are keen to develop the region's forests, according to Tapilatu. Francesca Lawe-Davies, Papua Development Coordinator for the World Bank, who has done extensive work in southern Papua, echoed this view in a conversation with poloff.

14. (SBU) Although the DPR approved the draft proposal in a plenary session, several key steps remain before the new provinces proposal can become law. Specifically, the proposal must be approved by the Yudhoyono administration.

NOT SO FAST

15. (SBU) President Yudhoyono, however, has sounded a cautious note regarding the whole matter. Speaking after the DPR approved the proposed measure, SBY said that the government would first thoroughly study the impact of the new provinces proposal before taking any action. Ginanjar Kartasasmita, Chair of the Regional Representatives Council (DPD), which must also approve new provinces, sounded a similar note. He said any action on the new provinces should be delayed at least until after the 2009 general election.

CRITICS ABOUND

16. (C) Many Papuan leaders have slammed the idea. The Chair of the Papuan People's Assembly, Forkorus Yaboysembut, told poloff that the drive to create new provinces was an attempt by Jakarta-based politicians "to divide" Papuans. Reverend Socratez Yoman, a vocal critic of Jakarta's policies toward Papua, sounded an even harsher tone. He alleged that the plan to create new provinces was merely a way for Jakarta "to buy off" Papuan elites with the promise of cash that would flow into new provincial governments.

17. (C) Aside from these concerns, Papua watchers also worry that the proposal will further weaken Papua's already tenuous governance institutions. H.S. Dillon, a member of the Papua Forum and the Partnership on Governance Reform in Indonesia, told poloff that new provinces in Papua would be "a disaster." He noted that although West Papua had been in existence for five years, it lacked effective government institutions in virtually all key areas and he wondered how new provinces would fare given such ongoing problems. Septer Manufandu of the Cooperation Forum of Papua NGOs (FOKER) remarked that the key problem in Papua was the effective

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delivery of public services. The creation of new provinces would make this challenge even more difficult, according to Manufandu.

18. (SBU) Some Papuans have begun to offer their own proposals for new provinces. On February 18, five bupatis from central Papua announced an agreement to create the province of "Central Mountain Papua," with its capital in the highland city of Wamena. Speaking for the group, Puncak Jaya regent Lukas Enembe said the move stemmed from dissatisfaction with the administration of Papua governor Suebu. Enembe charged that Suebu had not delivered the promised benefits of Special Autonomy to the people of the central highlands, forcing them to strike out on their own. (Note: The bupatis walked out of a recent donor coordination meeting chaired by Governor Suebu to make the announcement. Mission will report fully on that meeting septel.)

19. (SBU) But the proposed Central Mountain Papua province has also drawn criticism. Speaking at a rally in Oksibil, the capital of central Pegunungan Bintang regency, local legislators criticized the new proposal and said that residents of the area wanted to remain part of Papua province.

A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

110. (C) Papua Forum Chairman Albert Hasibuan, a well-established resource on Papua affairs, questioned the priorities of parties on either side of the issue. By taking too long to formally implement Special Autonomy, Hasibuan suggested, the Yudhoyono administration had invited proposals for new provinces. At the same time, Papuan elites, he claimed, saw the creation of new provinces as a way to gain power and access to funding that was supposed to return to Papua under Special Autonomy. Both sides should be focused on fixing Papua's problems, not creating new ones, according to Hasibuan.

¶11. (C) In any case, amid all the proposals and counter-proposals, our guess is that this issue will remain up in the air. Indonesians, in general, love to discuss the creation of new provinces and new localities (there have been recent discussions about new provinces in Sumatra and elsewhere). It is doubtful that any definitive steps will be taken any time soon. Not wanting to stir the pot in a restive region, the Indonesian government almost certainly will be cautious and will listen carefully to the objections of Papuans before proceeding with anything controversial.

HUME